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ABSTRACT

Kentucky's college and university composition programs have begun to deal with the issues of equity and quality for graduate teaching assistants and part-time faculty. Survey questionnaires were sent to writing program administrators at 40 of the Commonwealth's public and private institutions. Results indicated that composition and rhetoric teaching get a high degree of respect at the institutions, at least in lip service provided by the individuals answering the surveys. However, a large diversity in the treatment of part-time faculty, especially concerning pay range, was noted. Most respondents agreed that no English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students in a term, and that pay for part-time faculty should not be less than 75% of the compensation for comparable full-time duties. Responses revealed that per-course compensation and class size vary widely in Kentucky. It was clear that teachers at two-year colleges were doing more work for less pay in more difficult conditions. A presentation of the survey results to the Kentucky Philological Association, an English professors' group, has produced moves toward better pay, job stability, and political influence for part-time teachers. Such surveys can help provide the impetus for real improvement in composition program principles and standards. (SG)

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"Making the Wyoming Resolution a Reality: A 1992 Progress Report From Kentucky"

A Paper Delivered at the 1992 Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication

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Making the Wyoming Resolution a Reality:

A 1992 Progress Report From Kentucky

Good morning. This talk deals with equity and quality in composition programs, and I am happy to report that in Kentucky we have begun to deal with the difficulties of these issues.

For those of you who are new to this subject, I give you first a bit of history. In June of 1986, several graduate students and adjunct instructors who were attending the national Wyoming Conference on English, at the University of Wyoming, were upbraided for having the temerity to submit proposals--ultimately successful proposals--that ended up on the program. Some of the senior professors at the conference simply didn't think that the apprentices of the academy had the right to involve themselves in the professional activity of presenting scholarship, and these senior professors were not shy about saying so.

When the issue arose a year later at the 1987 Wyoming Conference on English, graduate students and adjunct faculty responded to perceived attacks with vigor. The ensuing discussion--or argument, or crying session, or (more accurately) all three of these modes of discourse--led to a series of formal and informal talks about the status of graduate assistants and part-time faculty. These talks, carried out in conference sessions in university classrooms by day and in the Cowboy Saloon in downtown Laramie by night, covered two kinds of questions. The first questions focused on the nuts-and-bolts issues of class

size, course syllabi, policymaking rights, and salary and benefits. The second category covered the larger issues of the flexibility or inflexibility of academic voice; the changing canon of composition and rhetoric; the place of women within academic institutions; and the place of composition within literary-oriented departments. Many of these issues were subsequently addressed by attendees of the conference through a "Statement of Stnadards and Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of English," written by a committee raised under the auspices of the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The statement generated wide discussion and dissemination through the pages of College English and College Composition and Communication, and was officially endorsed by NCTE and CCCC.

(If you are interested in more history, and a range of opinions on the progress of this issue, I recommend consulting articles by the CCCC Committee on Professional Standards; by the similarly-named CCCC Committee on Professional Standards for Quality Education; by the CCCC Executive Committee; and by Lalicker; Robertson et al.; Robinson; Tuman; and Wallace.)

Now for a bit of flashing forward, to 1991. Following the example of Prof. James McDonald of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, who had surveyed Louisiana writing programs a year earlier, several of us at Murray State University wrote and distributed a survey on teaching conditions and equity. The

questions were tied closely to the CCCC-endorsed statement. Since the issues involved focus on the roles of teaching assistants and part-time faculty--and with the attitude that such instructors should not have to rely solely on the noblesse oblige of the senior professors who supervise them--much of the research and analysis was performed by these somewhat marginalized members of our faculty. In fact, right now, I'd like to give credit to teaching assistant Rebecca Biggs and adjunct professors Linda Bartnik and Brenda Paschall for their part in writing, distributing, and analyzing the survey. As is often the case with such instructors, they can't be here today to share fully in the professional experience: Ms Biggs has moved away to further graduate work and teaching responsibilities; Ms Bartnik and Ms Paschall are home with their children.

To survey Kentucky's colleges and universities, we used the donated labor of these individuals, plus about $240.00 for duplication and postage provided by the Murray State University Department of English.

The survey was sent to 40 public and private institutions in Kentucky, and resulted in a high rate of response: within a month of distribution, 58% of the institutions had returned information. Four of the schools responding enrolled 3,000 to 23,000 students; eight (including the six community colleges responding) were in the 1,200- to 3,000-student range; and eleven enrolled 1,200 students or less. We addressed each survey to the writing program admnistrator: at smaller schools, the

Department of English chair; at most institutions, the composition director.

Our general discovery was that composition and rhetoric teaching get a high degree of respect in Kentucky colleges and universities, at least in lip service provided by the individuals answering the surveys. However, we also noticed a large diversity in treatment of part-time faculty, especially concerning pay range.

We divided our questions into two categories. The first category asked for responses along a five-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" on the philosophical points of status and standards in composition programs. The second part looked for more specific information concerning hiring policy, teaching load, promotion and tenure, and the proportion of graduate assistant and part-time staffing.

To take the first part first, we can report significant agreement in the Commonwealth of Kentucky concerning the general philosophies reflected in the NCTE and CCCC statement. But such agreement was by no means unanimous. For instance, to the position "No English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students a term," 57% "strongly agreed," 26% "agreed," 13% "disagreed," and 4% "strongly disagreed." On the question reading "Compensation, per course, for beginning part-time faculty should never be lower than 75% of the per-course compensation for beginning full-time faculty with comparable duties and credentials," adding "Part-timers should be eligible

for the same cost-of-living, seniority, and merit salary increases available to full-time faculty," 82% "strongly agreed" or "agreed," while 18% "disagreed." Thus, in these questions, which--like all of the survey questions--take their wording directly from the organization-endorsed "Statement of Principles and Standards," significant minority views exist to question those benchmark positions.

Moving to the second part of the survey--examining the actual practices of institutions concerning pay and working conditions--the picture in Kentucky is even more diverse. Per-course compensation ranged from $880.00 to $1900.00 for part-time composition instructors. The maximum class size for standard composition sections ranged from 18 students to 40 students. We discovered similar spreads for developmental writing sections, and in the total number of writing students per instructor per term.

Our analysis showed that some of the differences in philosophy and in practice were attributable to the many different varieties of institution we surveyed, and we particularly noticed the differences in assumptions and conditions between four-year and two-year colleges. We did have a section for open comments in the survey, and we requested that respondents identify their institutions, but some answerers appropriated the option of anonymity. Our analysis is not based, then, upon perfect knowledge, but upon the tendencies we were able to observe. Nevertheless, we received the impression that,

although common sense and our experiences suggest that teaching writing is certainly at least as challenging in community colleges as it is in universities, teachers at the two-year schools are teaching more students and doing more work for less pay and in more difficult conditions.

Now for the good news. Our exercise in surveying and distributing information suggests that knowledge is power, and that conducting a survey of this type can lead to improvements in an institution's compliance with the Wyoming Resolution principles and standards. For instance, in Kentucky, we publicized the survey results at the annual meeting of the Kentucky Association of Departments of English and the Kentucky Philological Association convention. Even in such hoary institutions--even with the somewhat outdated, literary-oriented title of the state organization of English professors--we received significant help and sympathy from senior colleagues. Professor Andrew Harnack came up with a resolution to improve the lot of part-timers, proposing that a Kentucky Coalition of Adjunct Faculty be formed, with the endorsement and funding of the Kentucky Philological Association, to let part-timers communicate and work together to overcome their underprivileged positions. Moreover, the resolution included permanent representative status on the Kentucky Philological Association's Executive Board, so that part-timers have a say in policy matters. To the surprise and delight of some of us present, the resolution passed unanimously. More locally, at Murray State

University, we used evidence of our part-timers' low pay and precarious job stability in comparison with the CCCC statement of principles, and in comparison with other state schools, to argue for improvements. As a result, pay for most adjuncts increased from $1,000.00 to $1,750.00 per section; adjuncts received official rights to vote on policy matters except for those reserved for senior faculty relating to tenure and promotion; adjuncts now earn the standard pay increases regular faculty earn; and adjuncts have a more stable job contract. Few administrators desire to be demonstrably behind their competition, and surveys such as the one we used in Kentucky can help provide the impetus for real improvement in composition program principles and standards.

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